

# *Paper wraps stone: monumental, manuscript, and printed epitaphs in eighteenth-century England*

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## Paper Wraps Stone: Monumental Manuscript and Printed Epitaphs in Eighteenth- Century England

John Le Nève (1679–1741), an English antiquarian who flourished in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, is best known for *Fair Ecclesiae Anglicanae*. This hefty collection of biographies of clergymen first published in 1716, became the foundation of a vast, multigenerational biographical project that next continues to the present day. By contrast, Le Nève's volumes of transcribed funeral monuments published between 1717 and 1719, *Monumenta Anglicana*, addresses the title of the new journal *Inscription*, issue “beginnings”, because it pioneers new ways of approaching the various media in which it is involved: printed stone, manuscript and print.

The methods that Le Nève adopts in *Monumenta Anglicana* are innovative in at least three ways. First, this text takes a familiar antiquarian practice – the transcription and publication of epitaphs – but it focuses on modern, rather than ancient, monuments. The first volume contains transcriptions of covers set up from 1700–1715; subsequent volumes cover the period from 1700–1718. Second, it comes a new item to a published text that seeks to gather information about the recently dead in one place: the obituary. Finally, it offers an early example of an unusual publishing practice: the subscription list and distribution of copies is the author, rather than a bookseller. These innovations are all inter-related aspects of Le Nève's self-consciousness towards the maturity of text.



Figure 1. John Le Nève, *Monumenta Anglicana*, vol. 1 (1717), title page. Courtesy Commons license, Wellcome Trust.

*Monumenta Anglicana* asks its readers to consider what happens when one kind of inscribed text (a monument) is transformed into another (a manuscript), and then further together into another (a printed text). In doing so, it offers an extended meditation on what it means to commemorate the dead not just in stone, but also in print. Furthermore, by emphasizing the essential difference between the media with which his text engages, Le Nève asks his readers to consider them in relation to one another. It presents paper-based memorials not as a poor substitute for stone, but rather

as a new kind of commemorative practice that exists alongside and in dialogue with inscribed monuments. He looks towards the future as well as the past as he transforms epitaphs through the medium of print.

### Inscriptions ancient and modern

Transcribed epitaphs feature in almost all antiquarian publications from the sixteenth and through to the early eighteenth centuries, alongside other inscribed objects such as coins and medals. During the early years of the seventeenth century, Le Nève's volumes, William Camden's *Rerum Regiarum Nobiliss (1608)* and Henry Holland's *Monumenta Episcopalia (1609)* take readers on tour of the libraries and the principal topography of entire texts. Two slim volumes, *Monumenta Anglicana* and *Monumenta Episcopalia*, respectively, however, which worked against the balance of the balance of the discourse. Le Nève's *Monumenta Anglicana* is a 900-page folio of transcribed epitaphs and monuments of Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral, respectively. These little texts barely register in the balance of the discourse. John Weever's colossal *Funerall Monuments (1631)*, a 900-page folio of transcribed epitaphs and monuments of Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral, respectively. These little texts barely register in the balance of the discourse. John Weever's colossal *Funerall Monuments (1631)*, a 900-page folio of transcribed epitaphs and monuments of Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral, respectively. These little texts barely register in the balance of the discourse.

John Le Nève began the first volume of his *Monumenta Anglicana* with an extended summary of the discourse most frequent, according to Graham Parry, of the seventeenth century. In the early years of the eighteenth century, Le Nève goes on to claim that he is pursuing the same text as John Weever, but after a method somewhat different from him.<sup>5</sup>

Weever portrays himself as a solitary epitaph hunter whose painstaking commitment to transcribing the verbal contents of monuments impressed itself physically, both on himself and on his book. Now content to reproduce epitaphs from earlier publications (he does not mention Camden or Holland's store books, which include some of the epitaphs that he also appears to have transcribed at first hand), he suffered for his calling as he rode around

Just as time obliterated sepulchres, so antiquarian pursuits left their mark on Weever: the delightful tone of this passage registers the pressure of an unfriendly, or obfuscated, Sepulchre, in this or that parish Church, and not found to be. Besides I have been taken from their diuers Churches by the Churchwardens of the parish, and has suffered to write the Epitaphs, or to take view of the Monuments as I much desired.

The importance that Weever ascribes to place and physical presence is reiterated in the structure of his text. *Funerall Monuments* moves slowly from parish to parish, families and local customs that help to make sense of them. Indeed, Weever warns that

I may perhaps be found fault withall because I doe not chronologically and according as Churches stand, neere or further remote in one and the same I have Iunited & wove my epigram and place the Funerall Monuments in this my booke but slip sometime from one side of a County to another before I complete an Epitaph.<sup>6</sup>

5. John Le Nève, *Monumenta Anglicana*, vol. 1 (1717), title page. 6. Weever, *sp.* 42.

south east England, recording the *inscriptions* that he found in each place. In the introduction to his work, he recalls that

Just as time obliterated sepulchres, so antiquarian pursuits left their mark on Weever: the delightful tone of this passage registers the pressure of an unfriendly, or obfuscated, Sepulchre, in this or that parish Church, and not found to be. Besides I have been taken from their diuers Churches by the Churchwardens of the parish, and has suffered to write the Epitaphs, or to take view of the Monuments as I much desired.











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price for the first two volumes of *Monumenta Augustina*, and I have begun to charge for the printed sheet from the third volume onwards. He writes:

*In a Collection of this kind, it is next to impossible to sell when we have enough. Number 1 of every pair of Sheets is difficult. Specter for this, say, let me find the Specter exactly to the Volumes of the shall be and 3d. the Specter any more or less, small paper, all and no less, I hope to be either Specter the 3d. (I hope), and who have lived) of 3d. per. which Rector Cernichowskian, an Editor the Largest, and making such (to do doing, the extravagance, with making such (to do doing, the themselves, with making such (to do doing, the must be over and print. (in. at).*

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Sj and L. K. Wondolowski, [cs@cs.berkeley.edu](mailto:cs@cs.berkeley.edu) (checked so Jane Smith)

and a lot



Figure 10. Le Nere, *Montemaldia*, 1709.  
Creative Commons license, Wellcome Images

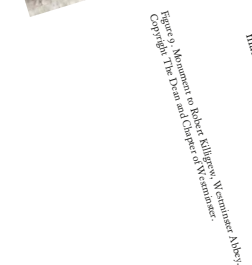
[illegible]

Figure 9: Monument to Robert K. Gilgrew, Westminster Abbey.  
Copyright: The Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

[illegible]





setting fire to the earth (the 'service'). Perhaps Le Neve thought this quotation especially apposite because it comes just after Phaëthon's epiphany:

HIC · SITVS · EST · PHAETHON · CVRRVS ·  
AVRIGA · PATERNI

QVEM · SI · NON · TENVIT · MAGNIS ·  
TAMEN · EXCIDIT · AVSIS

HERE PHAËTHON LIES: IN PHOEBUS  
CAR HE FARED,

AND THOUGH HE GREATLY FAILED,  
MORE GREATLY DARED.<sup>32</sup>

In a project that highlights the textual instability that arises when epiphits move between media, it seems entirely fitting that Le Neve seeks to associate his ambitious obituary with Phlaethon's doomed efforts. That he does so in an allusion that gabes the Latin original resonates – appropriately, if not deliberately – with his understanding that the act of textual transmission always also invites textual transformation.

No record of *Le Née's* death survives, although he seems to have lived several decades after 1719, when the fifth and final volume of *Memoria Anglica* was published.<sup>11</sup> No monument marks his final resting place, but the engraving on the title page of the last volume of *Memoria Anglica* could stand for *Le Née's* epitaph as well. This, too, is a quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, from the very last verses of that work: *... nec igitur / Nec potent ferre, nec celsa abolvere / ...* [and now my time is done, what gathering to the world of joys, not for, nor sword, nor the glowing torch of love, nor yet be able to undo, "*Le Née's* text is of time shall ever be able to undo, "*Le Née's* text is an act of metamorphosis that turns stone and manuscript into printed text, but that also self-consciously registers the process of transformation. And, as in Ovid, the altered body of text, while often apparently fairer than the original, advenes longevously through its capacity to change.

32. Ovid, pp. 82-83.

33. Nicholas Doggett, 'Le Nee, John (b. 1675)', [oxforddnb.com](http://oxforddnb.com) [accessed 20 June 2020].

34. Oxid, pp. 426-427.

*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 26 (30 March 1711).

28. Joseph Addison, *The Freeholder*, 35 (20 April 1716).

29. Paul Baines and Pat Rogers, *Estates of the Living* (1996).

follow: [...] When I read the several Dates of the Tombs, of some that dy'd Yesterday, and some six hundred Years ago, I consider that great Day when we shall all of us be Contemporaries, and make our Appearance together.<sup>27</sup>

[illegible]

Le Neve, however, constructs the relationship between which Addison

When a Church extremely decay'd, or out of Repair,  
By the mere Injury of Time, shall, by the Zeal of the  
Pastors, or by any other Assistants, be pulled  
down and rebuilt, there has been no Care, or Thought  
of erecting any Monuments which may be Necessary  
to record such Undertakings; but the Cause has been  
commonly said to have proceeded from the Want  
of Materials. But the Marble is thrown in [?] to pro-  
vide some aid. The first was a Church-house ... [?]  
Convent, as the Banns are at a Church-house, by six shew  
the Master of the Piece, I have now lying by me six shew  
of inscriptions, taken in the Year 1680, in the Church  
of St. Clements Dances, in which Year, we are told, this  
Church was taken down, and rebuilt at the Charge of

*the Parishioners, and some others; but, let any body find the Tombs, or any Footsteps of them, if they can; may I very much question, whether there be so much farther, I very much question, whether there be so much farther, I very much question, whether there be so much as another Copy of them now in being? (U, [A] r<sup>x-2</sup>)*

[illegible][illegible]

30. Weaver, KJ.

31. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, rev. by G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library, XII (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 82–83.